

Random Encounters

Nasty Surprises

By Jeff Quick



Permanent Death

At low levels, death is enough of a threat to player characters that they'll reconsider truly dangerous activities. By 9th level though, when the cleric can cast *raise dead*, death becomes a setback, not something to truly fear. Once characters start plane hopping in the low teens, they have access to outsiders who can cast *true resurrection*. Then death doesn't cost anything but money. Once high-level players feel comfortable that character death is merely an inconvenient option to life, it's a perfect time to bring in the *soul crusher*.

The crusher is a cylindrical machine 60 feet long and 20 feet in diameter, made of adamantite flecked with bone. The inside of the cylinder contains gnashing gears of cold iron along its length. The gears intermesh like a meat grinder, leaving room for nothing to get through its maw. The crusher has a hardness of 25 and 1,440 hit points. Its break DC is 45.



When operating, the *soul crusher* emits a harsh, grinding, metal-on-metal noise that can be heard up to ten miles on the Material Plane as well as across planar boundaries in coterminous planes. For instance, creatures on the Ethereal and Astral Planes up to ten miles away from the crusher's location can hear its grating noise. Creatures passing through the crusher's space in another plane take painful, searing damage from the experience.

This artifact was created long ago by generations of Wee Jas clerics who despaired at all the souls who died and went to live on myriad planes away from their beloved goddess. She who had so diligently reaped the harvest kept so little of her labor. The clerics decided that souls who wouldn't go to their mistress after death wouldn't go anywhere. One by one, as the clerics died, they committed their souls to power the machine in perpetuity.

When the machine absorbed enough souls, it began operating, churning out its ear-splitting noise and destroying souls of all who died within its range. Powerful undead creatures are drawn to the soul crusher's location when it turns up, since living creatures are unlikely to disturb the undead living nearby. When the soul crusher appears, it's not unusual for vampires, wights, and liches to live in relative harmony near it, each carrying out its own schemes from the relative protection of the crusher's influence.

Soul Crusher: This artifact absorbs and annihilates the souls of all who die within its range. Any living creature on the Material Plane who dies within ten miles of the *soul crusher* cannot be returned to life with a *raise dead*, *reincarnation*, or *resurrection* spell. A *wish* spell cannot return the destroyed soul to life, but a *miracle* spell has a 50% chance of recovering the soul's existence. If returned to existence, the soul can choose to continue to an appropriate afterlife, or return to life if the original body is available. However, the soul is loosely joined afterward. Forever after, the subject dies at 0 hit points instead of -10. If the victim ever dies again, his or her soul cannot be returned to its body.

The *soul crusher* has several effects on the living as well. All living creatures who hear the crusher's grinding noise become unsettled and apprehensive, and they must succeed at a DC 25 Will save or be permanently shaken. Creatures that make successful saving throws become immune to the noise for one day. A heal spell or effect removes the shaken condition from a victim. The artifact is surrounded by permanent *unhallow* and *anti-life shell* spells as cast by a 20th-level cleric.

The crusher's existence extends across every coterminous plane to the Material Plane. Anyone traveling through the space that the crusher occupies in any way -- physically, ethereally, astrally, or in shadow form -- takes 10d6 points of damage each round it remains in the space occupied by the crusher. No save is possible against this damage.

The single saving grace of the *soul crusher* is that the machine has a limit to the souls it will crush before fading into another plane or location on the Material Plane. Once the *soul crusher* has absorbed and destroyed d%+500 souls (501-600), the crusher teleports to another place on the Material Plane or any coterminous plane, no less than one hundred miles away from its previous location.

Strong necromancy; CL 20th; Weight 16,000 lbs.

Coming in Part 3 of Nasty Surprises

Magic items are such great things to have. What happens, though, when your PCs don't have them? How could this terrible situation come about?

[Return to Main Page](#)

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